

The Five Marks of Mission

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 February 2026

Preacher: Rev Carol Rattenbury

[0:00] Lord, we ask this morning that you would speak to us, that you would open our hearts to receive the word that you have for us.

! And Lord, that we know whatever challenge you pose to us, we have your Holy Spirit to empower and strengthen us to rise to that challenge.

Thank you, Lord. Amen. If I say the word missionary, what comes to mind? Somebody in shorts and a pith helmet, perhaps?

Yeah, so stomping through the jungle, going off to foreign places to tell others of the good news of the gospel. If I say to you, we're going to do mission, what reaction do you give?

Maybe you're a bit embarrassed. I don't know how that's going to work. I don't really do that. Maybe you reject the idea out of hand and it's too scary, I can't be doing that.

[1:12] Or maybe you just think, well, that's the minister's job and when we get our transition minister, they can do the mission bit as well. But mission is essentially one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

And when we found Jesus, the bread of life, why wouldn't we want to tell others who are in the same situation as ourselves, where they too can find Jesus, where they too can have that life-changing experience of who Jesus is and the impact of his love on their lives.

It's a simple sharing of experience. We don't need to be able to come up with a theological lecture to convince people.

We just need to tell them what Jesus has done for us. The Church of Scotland, back in 2020, agreed that the church to be fit for the 21st century needed to change.

And in many ways, we're living through that period of change. The alteration in the presbytery structure so that we've got so few presbyteries.

[2:43] The union and linkages of different parishes making big parishes. All that has been part of that General Assembly decision.

But one of the other things that the General Assembly at that time agreed was that something called the Five Marks of Mission was going to be crucial for going forward.

The Church needed to be more missionary-minded. We can no longer expect people just to come through our doors because we've opened them.

We need to have some way of reaching out. The Five Marks of Mission were originally developed by the Anglican Church back in the 1980s.

So it's taken a wee while for the Church of Scotland to catch up on that. But they are a useful summary of the mission of the church. And in a nutshell, they are...

[3:48] I think we should have a slide for this. Have we got a slide for this? To proclaim the good news. To go and tell the good news of the kingdom.

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers. To tend to those in need. To respond to their needs with loving service.

To take and to transform unjust structures in society. To challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.

And to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. The last two, you might think, well, I'm not quite sure how we're going to do those.

Maybe we could have a go at the first one, the second one. And we're perhaps quite good at the middle one. But they all hang together. We do have a...

[4:55] There you go. Marks of Mission. Sometimes we try in our own strength. And we end up like this chap. I think we've got a wee chap.

Yeah. He's tried to implement the five marks of Mission in his life. And he's not come out very well. He's been bruised as he's tried to mingle missionally with the folk at the pub. He's got a negative response.

And it's been bruising. Maybe physically bruising. But possibly just emotionally and spiritually. He sustained dog bites from trying to be nurturing with his neighbours.

And teaching them about what Jesus is all about. To disciple them. He's tried putting love in action.

[5:54] And has gone to the local soup kitchen. But unfortunately his toe got crushed with a can that fell off the shelf.

He was stood in the queue trying to get into the football match. And everybody was pushing. So he needed to sort out that situation.

So that the young children weren't getting pushed out of the way. That didn't end well either. And he ended up with a head injury.

And then trying to deal with nature and safeguard the integrity of creation.

Well his attempts in his own garden just ended up with him being scratched to bits. And he didn't get on very well with that either. This is a bit of a caricature of some of the things that we might try to do in our own strength.

[6:58] To put these five marks of mission into practice. And how it might not work out quite as we'd wanted. But you know. Mission doesn't have to be a harrowing experience.

He was forcing himself to do mission things. And they weren't working. So let's remember.

Mission is about one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. And when we get that.

Mission comes more naturally.

Now you might be thinking this is all a very big ask. I'm going to mention something now that the presbytery is sponsoring.

It's some sessions by a group called ACORN. And ACORN is seeking to connect Christians with the work God is doing in their community.

[7:58] Through caring conversation. So it's helping us to tell. But it's also discipling us. So it's putting a tick in two of those boxes.

ACORN stands for asking. Asking God who he's speaking to. Answering the call of God. To go to that person.

Obedying God. In saying what God's put on our hearts. Reporting back to others. Reporting back to others. And telling them of the conversation we've had.

And noticing. Noticing the things that God is doing. Now ACORN is meeting. Is putting on a.

Is that. Is doing a series of events. On the Black Isle. But it's not just for the churches of the Black Isle. It's for all the.

[9:02] The whole of presbytery. Starts this Wednesday. It's in Kolboki Church Centre. Seven o'clock. The first one is an introduction. And then.

Then there's. Seven more. That take us through. The ACORN principles. If you're at all. Nervous about sharing your faith.

And you don't know how to do it. But. I suggest. I would really strongly recommend coming along. I've talked to Paul. Who's the guy who's going to be leading it.

On behalf of presbytery. And he. He's so committed to this. And. He speaks so well. And he.

You know. You will end up enthused. And go. To try and find people. Not to harangue with the gospel. But just to talk naturally.

[9:56] And let. God conversations. Come naturally. Into our interactions with others. So. If you've got Wednesday evenings free. I do. Recommend.

The. These eight week sessions. With Paul. In the Kolboki Church Centre. And I know you know where it is. Because the choir sings there. But why is mission important?

What is it? Why am I so banging on about this? Why. Why is the General Assembly so. So keen for us to grasp these five. Five marks of mission.

And to go and tell people. About the Lord. Well. Our reading. Is. Jesus's last will and testament.

To his disciples. I'll just. Read them again. Jesus said. Go. Go. And make disciples. Of all nations.

[10:55] Baptising them in the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. And teaching them to obey everything. I have commanded you. And surely. I am with you always.

To the very end. Of the age. One of the positive. Well. Lots of positives in that. But for me. One of the things that I take from that. Is that Jesus isn't leaving me to get on with it. He's not leaving the world. To do things. On its own.

He is going to be with us. To the very end of the age. Yes. We are going to witness to him. What he's done. And what he intends to do.

But we do it with him. And whilst this was said to the disciples. Over 2,000 years ago. It still.

[11:53] Is relevant to us today. We inherit this commission. He tells us to go. To make disciples.

To baptize. To teach. And because he's with us. When we do step out. To do those things. We know we step out with him.

The whole of the Bible. Is about God's redemptive mission. God is all about mission. His mission. His mission. Is to save. And redeem.

A fallen world. A fallen people. Right from the book of Genesis. That Abraham. Abrahamic covenant. That the Lord and Abraham made.

God says to Abraham. I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you. And all peoples. On earth. Will be blessed.

[12:55] Through you. All peoples. All peoples. On earth. That's all time. And all space. God has always intended.

His people. To be a source of blessing. For the whole world. It's not for us to keep. It's not for us to. To hold. And. And not let go of.

God is set on completing. His mission. Because he loves us. He made us.

And he loves us. So. Love is that. The heart. Of God's mission. And we only have to look at Jesus. And see. In him. That expression. Of God's love. God loves us so much. He sent his son. Just need to grasp that.

[13:56] And we respond to that love. By showing love in return. By showing. The same love that Jesus had. For people. When we examine that love.

We find it's. Self-sacrificial. It's not. Putting yourself at the center. It's giving yourself. To others. And God.

Includes us. In his opportunity. To love others. And he gives us. That opportunity. To be.

Partner. In his mission. Because. Christian mission. Isn't like. Any other mission. It doesn't depend on us.

Or our skills. Our talents. Our strengths. Or our weaknesses. It depends on God. It's. Missio Dei. God's mission. It's him.

[14:54] Doing what he needs to do. To redeem. The world. To save. To heal. To restore. To renew. It's God's work.

The work of the father. The son. And the holy spirit. And he invites us. To join. In his. Awfully big adventure. So. In simple terms.

Mission. And ends. And ends. With God. He is the God. Of mission. He is the God. Who actively seeks. To bring about.

His purpose. For the world. And we're invited. To be part of it. we sum up this idea of saving and healing restoring and renewing we put all that under the umbrella of salvation and it is wholeness and healing is all about salvation enjoying that forgiveness which brings about those things but it's God's salvation because salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb we don't deserve it we don't merit it and yet it's freely given as John wrote in his first letter we know and rely on the love God has for us God is love whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them the God of mission has sent his son to defeat sin and death and through Jesus has sent us the Holy Spirit to complete that transformation so as Jesus says peace be with you as Jesus breathes on you and says receive the Holy Spirit you and the other disciples begin to be transformed begin to be free of the fear that's trapped you your lives become different and as that transformation filters down you end up transforming the people around you because God is working through you and that's how society gets transformed how creation is transformed you might never see the end result

but you've been part of the chain you might have been one of the dominoes somewhere along that line never knowing who who is going to be reached at the end of it but you've been part of it our God our God of mission has a church and he's calling his church and he's equipping his church to be involved in his mission we are sent as Jesus said as the Father has sent me I send you Jesus was sent for a purpose and we are sent for that same purpose to spread the good news of the kingdom it's wrong for us to think that it's our mission that somehow we have to do it all and then deliver it back to God as a complete package that's not how it works we work alongside God it's his mission it always is always has been and always will be God has us as his servants as if you like his hands and feet on the ground he will use us but it's his mission and he sends us out to be involved in this transformation a scholar called Maltman encapsulates it by saying it's not the church that has a mission the mission of salvation to fulfil in the world it's the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church creating a church as it goes on its way the God of mission equips us with his Holy Spirit so just to finish let's have a quick look at some of those marks of mission the first one tell

[19:53] I think this is the one that we probably usually associate with the idea of mission it's that focus on evangelism on sharing the message of Christ's love through words and lifestyle good news is for sharing isn't it now I used this illustration before and somebody came back to me and said I said who keeps the news of a new baby secret and then I found out somebody had or maybe it's a job promotion maybe you've got the all clear from cancer you don't keep those things to yourself do you you want to tell others and shout it from the rooftops we want to tell our friends and family so why don't we tell them about Jesus we can do that in words and we can do that by the way we live when we live the way

Jesus wants us to live showing love compassion understanding if you like going the extra mile then that speaks volumes the second one is to teach to baptize and to nurture new believers discipling them teaching them the things that we've picked up over the years and are now part of who we are and what we do we need to pass those on that's why Christian education is important that's why our Bible studies are important they help us build up a community of faith we need to be more in tune with God than just turning up on a Sunday for a service we need to be built up in our faith to learn more about the God we serve more about the God we have faith in so challenge there to find ways to learn more to avail yourselves of the opportunities to learn more we also need to respond to the needs of others in loving service or to tend them because it's all teas we do like being practical don't we we like giving the doing things serving the teas doing all those other things that are looking after people's needs we collect food for the food bank that's what one of these things are we support missionary organisations like the adopt a child that's love in action maybe we support medical missionaries like the leprosy mission that's love in action you see

Christians have always stood out as different because of the care and compassion they had back in Roman times girl babies or babies who were born with some sort of deformity or handicap were often just left on the rubbish heap literally on the rubbish heap to die the Christians came along adopted them looked after them and cared for them and so when in the second century so it's going back a bit Tertullian wrote they say that's the pagans look how these Christians love one another because they the pagans hate one another it was a witness that caring attitude that love attitude and not just for your own they were rescuing babies that they had no idea of their heritage and then we come to this seeking to transform unjust structures in society to transform the world in which we live this is a call for social justice and we think what can

I do just little me how can I transform the whole of society and that is a very good question but if we don't find ways to speak out evil will triumph if we do nothing that's all it takes for us to say nothing to keep quiet so we must pray and we must find ways that we can speak truth to power how we can challenge injustice and transform society and then there's the treasuring of our environment we live in a beautiful place we live with mountains and the sea and rivers and it's glorious we could have a whole sermon on well we could have a whole series of sermons on environmental theology and our stewardship of what

God has entrusted to us but we are called to be stewards not exploiters yes the world was given to mankind to look after not to exploit not to pillage and what have we done we've made a pretty bad job of our stewardship so we need to look and see how we can turn that around and do things

differently because God cares for what he made when he finished his acts of creation he said it was good it was very good he took delight in it and then we messed it up so there's a challenge for us to look at our lifestyles and see how we can be more caring about the environment and underlying all these five marks of mission we need to be prayerful we need to discern the way that God is leading his church the way that he's leading us as individuals the way he's bringing us up against people who need to know the good news we need to listen attentively and we need to allow people to be themselves we need to respect them we need to have compassion not being patronising but we need to have compassion in ways that truly rescue and free people we need to be humble it's not about us it's about

[27:50] Jesus and we need to be we need to act in a safe way protectively not using controlling or coercive behaviours to persuade people about Jesus because that's that's not really what it's about and we need to be inclusive and recognise that the good news is for everyone we don't need to wait for our transition minister to take this forward we need to start now taking these issues seriously if we serve God missionally we will grow as individuals and as a community of God's people and this will be a big asset for our transition minister he will be encouraged by our willingness to learn and to look outwards at the wider community or she so yeah let's let's start doing these things now and the things that we are doing let's do with renewed enthusiasm because we're serving the Lord amen so we're going we're to we're to we're to